




Speech By
Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Record of Proceedings, 16 October 2018

TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (5.57 pm): I rise to add to the debate on the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018. In doing so I have been listening closely to those members who have spoken so far and I must congratulate the majority of them on the content of their speeches. I have sat here and absorbed a lot of what has been said.

The objectives of this bill are to enable reasonable and safe access by women to terminations and to regulate the conduct of registered health practitioners in relation to terminations. Let us be honest: this is the Labor Party playing politics with what is a really important issue and it should be condemned for that.

I come to this debate as a husband, a brother, a father and a grandfather and as such I have consulted with those important women in my life. I have consulted directly with my mother. I have consulted with my wife. I have consulted with my sister. I have had a long conversation with my daughter and my nieces. I have talked to both of my staff members who are female; one who is pregnant at the moment and, in fact, has just started maternity leave and the other one has not started a family yet. All of those people that I have consulted with, after I have explained to them exactly what this bill does, agree with the position that I will articulate in the rest of my speech.

In this debate we have heard many say that the termination of pregnancy should not be in the Criminal Code and I totally agree with that. It should not be in the Criminal Code. However, it is a fact that every year in this state that there are over 14,000 abortions and so far nobody has been charged with a criminal offence. That is a fact. Therefore, why are we changing the law? As I said before, frankly, this is just the Labor Party playing politics. However, if we accept that abortion should be taken out of Criminal Code and if that is what the Labor Party wants to do, it could have simply done it. I would say that the majority of the members in this House—I will not speak for everyone but based on those who have spoken so far—seem to overwhelmingly support taking abortion out of the Criminal Code and making it a health issue, as it really should be. However, this bill goes much further.

We are talking about the on-demand termination of a pregnancy at 22 weeks gestation. As the member for Bonney quite rightly said, in this country we see medical practices change dramatically. In 1986, my firstborn children, my twins, were born prematurely at 37 weeks. There was quite a bit of concern about their survival. At that time, babies born under 32 to 33 weeks were deemed to be in extreme danger and people were really concerned about them. Now we hear that a 22- or 23-week foetus is viable. In fact, close family friends of members of my family had a baby at 23 weeks. That baby is now three years old and is very healthy and living a great life. I would hate to have seen something happen to that child. I think 22 weeks is way too late. I look forward to seeing the amendments that might be moved in consideration in detail, to see exactly how that goes.

It is completely false for members on the other side to come into this place and tell us that, because at around the 22- to 25-week mark medical tests are done to tell whether there are issues with a foetus, citing a gestation period of less than 22 weeks for on-demand terminations would affect whether or not that child could be aborted. The bill allows for an abortion to occur after 22 weeks if two

doctors look at the situation and decide that it is required medically to abort that child. We all agree that there are circumstances where a foetus is not viable or has deformities that mean the baby should be aborted. However, there are lots of cases where that should not happen.

I totally disagree that one of the things that should be taken into account by doctors looking at this issue is the social circumstances of the woman seeking the abortion or the future social circumstances of that person. That is abhorrent and should not be part of this discussion.

In summary, I think we should take abortion out of the Criminal Code. It should not be part of the Criminal Code. I totally agree that it should be up to a woman to decide what happens with her body and her health. However, on-demand terminations at 22 weeks is way too late. I would like to see that figure lowered. Taking into account changes in medical technology, we are not far away from a time when these things will be determined by DNA. Therefore, 22 weeks is way too late and having abortions after 22 weeks decided on social grounds is not acceptable to me.

We need to take into account issues around a doctor's conscientious objection to performing an abortion. In that circumstance, a doctor should not have to refer a person to another doctor. Looking back to 1986 when my sons were born, we decided to have them circumcised. We took them to a doctor who said, 'No, I do not want to do that'. He was not forced to refer us to anybody. He did not have to do that. This was just chopping off a little bit of skin, but he was not forced to send us to another doctor who would perform that procedure. We had to hunt around for ourselves. Therefore, if a person needs a termination performed they can find another doctor who will do it for them.

I will be watching the rest of this debate with interest. I will be watching to see the results of the debate on the amendments that are moved. At that time I will make my final decision as to which way I will vote. I can tell the House that I am inclined not to support the bill, because of the reasons that I have outlined.